

OFFICE OF AUDITS
MEMORANDUM REPORT 98-CI-010
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATES PROGRAM REVIEW
July 1998

In accordance with the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) FY 1997 audit plan we reviewed the Department of State's Professional Associates (PA) program. The PA program provides employment opportunities for eligible family members (EFMs) of Foreign Service employees by placing them in vacant junior officer positions at selected overseas posts. The objective of the review was to determine if the program is a cost effective means of filling staffing gaps overseas and providing employment opportunities for EFMs.

We found that the PA program is a cost-effective way to fill staffing gaps overseas. It also offers employment to Foreign Service family members. The Department, however, has not maximized the program as an alternative source of staffing. The estimated savings in travel, housing, shipping, and associated support costs is approximately \$105,000 annually over the cost of a junior officer (JO) position. The program provides EFMs with an opportunity to work and contribute to the mission of the post. We believe that because of the positive attributes of the PA program it should be expanded outside the Consular cone to other cones such as Administrative. However, we also found opportunities to improve the program, including a need for more coordination and flexibility, better performance standards, and increased training support. We made recommendations to address the weaknesses we identified.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

To accomplish our review objective, we performed audit work at the Office of the Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Personnel (M/DGP), the Bureau of Personnel (PER), the Family Liaison Office (M/DGP/FLO), the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA), and applicable regional bureaus. We also performed fieldwork from March to April 1997 in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Managua, Nicaragua; and London, England. At these locations we met with PAs, consular officers and supervisors, and other embassy officers connected with the program. We also distributed a questionnaire to all PAs and their supervisors worldwide.

This review was conducted by the Consular and International Programs Division of the Office of Audits from January through June 1997, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Major contributors were David Wise, division director; Jesse

Roth, audit manager; Jody Beverly, analyst-in-charge; and Sharon Moorefield, auditor. M/DGP's comments on the draft of this report have been incorporated where appropriate and are included in their entirety as Appendix A. Subsequent meetings were held with M/DGP officials to discuss and resolve disagreements with some of the recommendations. The results of those meetings are reflected in the report after the applicable recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The PA program, started in November 1994, was proposed by CA to address JO hiring shortfalls in the consular cone and to increase employment opportunities for EFMs. The PA program is different than other alternative staffing programs because it provides employment to EFMs who are already at post, thus costing the Department less in administrative support costs. Under the general appointment authority of chapter 3, section 309, of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (3 FAM 123), the program was established to appoint eligible family members into funded JO positions that would otherwise be vacant due to hiring deficits. After a 2-year pilot phase, the program moved to its full program phase in November 1996. By the end of 1996, there were 30 PAs serving at 18 posts. An additional 15 PAs were hired in 1997. The Department has committed a total of 60 positions to the program after 1997. The Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs stated that the PA program has met its objective of filling vacant JO slots, which has been critical to addressing the ever increasing consular workload overseas.

A steering committee originally directed the PA program. A representative from M/DGP chaired this committee, which also included members from PER's Recruitment, Exams, and Employment Office (PER/REE), the Office of Career Development and Assignments (PER/CDA), the Office of Overseas Employment (PER/OE), M/DGP/FLO, the Bureau of Consular Affairs Executive Office (CA/EX), the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs Executive Office (ARA/EX), and other regional bureaus as appropriate. According to a founding member of the committee, this format worked well because all officials involved in overseeing the program were available on a regular basis to answer questions and make decisions.

The PA committee met regularly to discuss the program. The committee worked with PER/CDA and CA/EX to identify which posts would have a vacant JO slot and have sufficient consular work to require a PA. After the committee had identified potential posts, it sent an initial cable to notify EFMs about the program. After the committee compiled the final list and PER approved it, PER issued the formal vacancy announcements. M/DGP/FLO received applications for the PA positions and shared them with the committee. Committee members provided comments regarding a particular post and the applicants, checked references, and made selection decisions. One advantage of this collaborative process was that it included regional bureau representatives, who were usually most knowledgeable about a particular post. In October 1996, control of the program was transferred from the PA program committee to PER/CDA.

The OIG's Office of Inspections issued a report in 1991 on the Bureau of Consular Affairs in which it recommended that CA, working with M/DGP and the Office of the Legal Adviser, take the necessary regulatory action to empower EFMs to authorize visas, sign notarials, and to

perform other tasks not requiring the personal attention of career consular officers. In response, the Department has proposed legislation that broadens the definition of “Consular Officer” and removes legislative limitations on what tasks PAs can do.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

The PA program is a cost-effective method of filling staffing gaps overseas and providing employment opportunities for EFMs. The estimated savings in travel, housing, shipping, and associated support costs is approximately \$105,000 annually over the cost of a JO position. The program provides the PAs with an opportunity to work and contribute to the mission of the post. However, there are several opportunities for program expansion and improvement. Specifically, we found (1) room for expansion beyond the consular cone to other cones, (2) fragmented program management and a lack of coordination, (3) an inadequate selection process, and (4) a lack of program flexibility (including limitations on what duties a PA may perform). In addition, we also found personnel issues, such as inadequate performance standards and a lack of training support. As a result, we believe that the Department has demonstrated less than full support for the PA program.

Professional Associates Program Benefits

The cost savings resulting from the appointment of a PA was one of the major factors considered by the Department in implementing the PA program. PA staff are less costly than JO and other alternative staffing because support costs such as housing are already paid for the PA’s spouse. The estimated savings in travel, housing, shipping, and associated support costs, according to the Bureau of Finance and Management Policy, is approximately \$105,000 annually over the cost of a JO position. In addition, the PA program keeps families together and provides employment for Foreign Service family members.

The PA program benefits the Department by addressing hiring shortfalls and providing employment for Foreign Service family members. We found that consular supervisors in general considered PA work to be good and vital to filling the void left by JO vacancies. Post management officials told us that the program is invaluable and that posts would not be able to function efficiently without PAs. At the posts we visited, various PAs stated that the program gave them the opportunity to work and contribute to the mission of the post. In addition, EFMs consider a PA position a better employment option than other part-time, intermittent, or temporary (PIT) appointments or personal services contracts (PSC).

Expansion to Other Cones

The committee originally developed the program as a broad employment mechanism that could be used as an alternative staffing method in cones other than consular. The March 1994 decision memorandum implementing the program stated that the program pertained to consular positions, but it also stated that the outline and criteria were adaptable to administrative, political, or economic assignments. The program was initially confined to consular activities because of the pressing need for staffing in that area. However, there are no legal restrictions to program

expansion. The November 1996 status report on the program stated that program expansion should include all Foreign Service occupations, including all skills and cones, if a real need exists. We conclude, based on our observations of the PA program and discussions with Department officials, that by limiting the program to consular activities, the Department fails to use spouses to their full potential, leaving positions unfilled and unmanageable levels of work for officers at many posts.

Several consular officers expressed concern that using PAs exclusively in consular work degrades the status of JOs performing similar functions because it implies that duties in consular are less important or complex than in other cones. A PA supervisor stated that there is absolutely no reason that non-career individuals could not fill entry-level positions across the board in the Foreign Service. Considering the potential cost savings attained by using a PA (approximately \$105,000 per position), we believe hiring a PA for other cones should be considered. The increasing consular workload and staffing shortages ensure that the most pressing need for PAs will be in that cone. However, PAs can be used in other positions, such as administrative, personnel, general services, secretarial, or even political and economic. At posts we visited, senior officials in the administrative cone agreed that there are family members with the aptitude and skills necessary for positions in the administrative cone and that with the proper training, these spouses could be used at post. Further, an administrative staffing shortage was noted as a material weakness in the Department's 1997 Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act Report to the President and Congress. Post officials were less enthusiastic about the need for PA positions in the political and economic areas, stating that vacant JO slots are not as prevalent as in the consular and administrative areas.

Officers in the administrative cone stated that PAs could work as secretaries, or as general services, personnel, or administrative junior officers. These positions would be especially useful for spouses with experience in those fields or spouses who may not have the background or language skills for consular work. With one exception, posts have not received permission to fill vacancies outside of the consular cone with a PA. For example, one post tried to fill a vacant secretarial position with a PA who was at post and had the necessary foreign language skills. However, PER directed the post to leave the position vacant while a Foreign Service secretary was selected and completed language training. The position was left vacant because the focus of the PA program has been on consular positions and the post was concerned about funding the position. Using PAs appropriately for other embassy positions would be a cost-effective method to fill important vacancies, avoid unnecessary staffing gaps, and improve embassy operations.

Although officials in the Department and at post stated that PAs with the proper background and education could theoretically be used in the political or economic cones in reporting jobs, JO vacancies in these cones are relatively rare. If a vacancy should occur in a political or economic JO position, a JO from the consular or administrative cone would generally be willing to rotate or be detailed to the position. JOs should be given first choice to go into these cones in order to enhance their career development.

Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments, subject to applicable anti-nepotism laws and regulations, should expand the Professional Associates program to cones other than the consular cone so that qualified eligible family members can serve in the general services, administrative, personnel, political, and economic offices in the event that no officer is available to fill the position.

M/DGP agreed with this recommendation and stated it has already listed the expansion of the PA program as a long-term objective under the Family Friendly Initiative. In addition, M/DGP will be studying means to expand the program to include other entry-level positions that are in deficit overseas. Because of M/DGP's action, the recommendation is considered resolved with the issuance of this report.

Program Management Improvements Needed

As stated on page 3, the PA program benefits the Department in a number of ways. However, there are several opportunities for program improvement that have persisted, thus demonstrating less than full support by management for the PA program. Specifically, we found (1) fragmented program management and a lack of coordination, (2) an inadequate selection process, and (3) a lack of program flexibility. In addition, we also found personnel issues, such as inadequate performance standards and a lack of training support.

Inadequate Management Support of Program

The Department has not addressed a number of systemic program weaknesses that impede the expansion of the program, thus demonstrating less than full support for the PA program. For example, the Department has not provided appropriate guidance to PA supervisors and managers regarding how the program should function. Also, the Department has not provided information on openings to the potential pool of applicants. Because of poor communication from the Department (PER/CDA) to posts about the program, post management and officers working with PAs do not clearly understand the program and some have not used their PAs to their full potential. For example, we observed that supervisors spent considerable time researching answers to routine personnel questions that should have been readily available. Junior officers and PA supervisors at post stated that they had no idea how PER selected posts to receive PAs, how it selected the PAs themselves, and whether their post, once selected, would permanently have a PA slot. Some post officials stated that they were often unaware whether a vacating PA would be replaced by another PA or a Foreign Service officer. Post officials also stated that PER did not inform them regarding the status of their PA hires. For example, one post we visited was unaware that PER had selected a PA for the post until the PA contacted the post. Because the post had several applicants for the PA position who were already at post, several post officials stated that PER had managed the whole process poorly.

Supervising officers at posts we visited were often unclear about the regulations governing PA supervision and administration. For example, one immigrant visa section chief did not know if he should evaluate the PA working in that section on the PIT form or the JO form. He stated that

he was unable to get an answer to this and other questions from anyone at the Department. We believe the JO form is appropriate for evaluating the PA because the PA's responsibilities are similar to those of a JO. Other post officials noted that they were unaware that they should promote PAs after 1 year (which they could if the PA's performance warranted a promotion), and that they also did not know what duties PAs could or could not perform. In one case, due to lack of guidance from the Department for several months, a PA's supervisor limited the PA to the same duties that the PA had performed before moving to the PA program.

Recommendation 2: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should develop Professional Associates program guidance and distribute it to every post. The guidance should include, but not be limited to, information on how posts are selected to have professional associates; how professional associates are selected for the program; range of duties of professional associates; how professional associates are rated and what form is used; and the timing of promotion actions.

Recommendation 3: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should include and annually update guidance regarding professional associates supervision and administration.

M/DGP disagreed with Recommendation 2, stating that it provided posts with very detailed information and instructions when the program began. Our analysis indicated that the guidance initially sent out was incomplete. For example, the guidance did not explain what responsibilities PAs should be assigned or specify the process for evaluating PA performance.

M/DGP agreed with Recommendation 3 and stated that it will ensure that periodic reminders and updates will be sent out on procedural matters.

Lack of Program Coordination

In October 1996, the Director General eliminated the PA program committee and centralized the program within PER/CDA to provide one point of contact for the program. We found that program coordination under PER/CDA was deficient. For example, although January is a busy time in the placement cycle when posts are selected to have PAs, PER/CDA did not consult regional bureaus to assist with post selection. In one case the regional bureau representative had to inform the program coordinator that there was a current PA vacancy that should be listed. The same regional bureau representative expressed concern about not being kept fully apprised of program developments and that without group consultation, the program would not receive the necessary attention.

PER/CDA unilaterally developed the list of PA positions for 1997 instead of arriving at the list of potential PA positions using input from regional bureaus. Some Department officials expressed concern that PA vacancies or posts that could have received PAs were not on the list. In addition, PER/CDA's cable announcing the 1997 program identified only ten positions as PA slots. Eventually, through unsolicited advice from the regional bureaus' PIT coordinators, this number was raised to 15.

The Department placed the PA program in PER/CDA because the assignment of PAs is tied to JO assignments, and PER/CDA should know where the positions and staffing needs are. However, at the time of our review, the program coordinator was also responsible for other programs and was unable to devote the necessary time to the PA program. Although the program is small, it required a significant amount of time to administer. During the previous selection cycles, the committee devoted considerable time to administering the program.

Because the program coordinator was overtasked with other projects, PER/CDA has not been able to adequately coordinate the program, including obtaining input from regional bureaus on vacancies and staffing needs. To improve program effectiveness, the Department should allocate adequate management resources to the PA program's administration.

Recommendation 4: The Bureau of Personnel should devote appropriate resources, including staff time, to the Professional Associates program to ensure proper coordination and administration of the program.

M/DGP initially disagreed with the recommendation, stating that because the regional bureaus provide administrative and technical support for the PAs no additional personnel are needed to run the program. In a subsequent meeting with the OIG, M/DGP officials agreed to establish a backup position which would facilitate proper coordination and administration of the program by addressing collateral duties when needed.

Late Announcement of Professional Associate Positions

PER/CDA failed to comply with standard operating procedures (SOPs) developed by the committee governing the PA assignments process by not releasing the list of PA posts in a timely manner. These SOPs directed program administrators to (1) compile a list of probable PA posts for the next assignment cycle in September or October and distribute the list to Foreign Service bidders and EFMs, (2) send an All Diplomatic and Consular Posts (ALDAC) cable of probable posts in November, and (3) send a second ALDAC with the final list of PA posts in December or January. In 1997, the only notification to officers and their eligible family members of potential PA posts was the final list, which was sent February 21, 1997.

Regional Bureau officials were concerned that PER/CDA did not release the list of PA posts in a timely manner. An official in PER/CDA stated that PER/CDA did not send the preliminary list in 1997 because his office believed it could pinpoint the need for PAs and that in the past, posts were disappointed when they appeared on the preliminary list and were subsequently cut. However, the preliminary list is also necessary to assist Foreign Service officers and spouses in their planning for future bids. The JO and PA assignment processes should parallel each other. The timing of PA selections is linked to that of the Foreign Service officer bidding cycle so that spouses can consider the program in bidding on the next post. The program will not address the needs of applicants or the Department if it is not coordinated with the JO cycle.

Recommendation 5: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should ensure that the cable announcing potential professional associate posts is released in accordance with the standard operating procedures for the program in time to be used as a planning tool.

M/DGP agreed with the recommendation and stated that this year a list of available positions was provided in late November or early December. In addition, the deadline for applying for a PA position was extended to February to allow the principal employee to be assigned before the PA applicant must apply for a position. Therefore, the recommendation is closed with the issuance of this report.

Selection of PAs Should Consider All Qualification Requirements

Not all qualification requirements have been adequately considered in some PA selections. The requirements, as outlined in the PA program announcement for 1997, include knowledge of consular functions, relevant experience, and fluency in English and language proficiency at language-designated posts. However, several consular officers stated that without an interview or advice from post during the selection process, applicants who were not fully qualified for a position could be selected as PAs. For example, several applicants in the past have not had the necessary English language skills to do consular work and successfully complete the Department's basic consular training course. The Department is stressing English language ability in the application materials in an effort to counter this problem, however, an interview would further reveal the applicants' command of English before they were selected.

Although most senior officers at posts indicated that they preferred having the PA selection made at the Department, they stated that posts should provide comments regarding an applicant's abilities in areas such as language and work experience. Senior consular officials, PA supervisors, and PA program committee members at the Department stated that having the PA selection made at the Department was appropriate as it assured integrity in the selection process and removed the appearance of favoritism at post. However, some PA supervisors stated that post officials should have a chance to comment on an applicant's abilities, especially if applicants are from their post. Officials at a post may have more knowledge about an applicant's language skills, experience, and strengths than the program coordinator. Post officials acknowledged that they should not have the final say on the selection, because there may be applicants from other posts, but stated that they should at least have the option to comment on applicants' qualifications.

Recommendation 6: As part of the professional associate selection process, the Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should ensure that all selection requirements are addressed and coordinate with posts to obtain comments on applicants' qualifications.

M/DGP initially disagreed with the recommendation and stated in its response that the recommendation is unnecessary because the PA selection board has a representative from the regional bureau. M/DGP further stated that posts may use this channel for input, but it is

inadvisable for them to have a direct say in the selection process, since issues of favoritism might be raised.

We did not intend for posts to make final decisions on PA applicants, only that posts' views be considered as appropriate. Therefore, we modified the recommendation to clarify our point. In a subsequent meeting with the OIG, M/DGP officials stated that they agreed with the revised recommendation and will disseminate guidance to facilitate coordination with posts in obtaining comments on applicants' qualifications.

Lack of Program Flexibility

The PA program lacks flexibility because it does not provide for addressing PA vacancies at posts outside of the regular recruitment cycle, and it is difficult for posts to request that a PA be used to fill a vacancy at post. By only placing PAs on the summer cycle and not allowing posts to request or identify potential PA positions, the program is precluded from addressing some overseas staffing gaps. Post officials stated that if a PA position becomes vacant (usually through resignation or the curtailment of the sponsoring spouse's tour) there is no mechanism to replace that PA before the next bidding cycle. For example, at one post where the PA resigned, there was another qualified candidate who could have been hired to fill the position. The position remained vacant for about 3 months, and resulted in a significant staffing gap and visa processing backlog in the busy consular section before the Department instructed the post to hire the PA candidate as a PSC. Because there was no mechanism for off-cycle placement, the Department would not authorize hiring a PA to replace the departing PA until the regular bidding cycle opened. This lack of program flexibility resulted in a consular operations staffing shortage at the post, a curtailment of developmental rotations and special projects for the JOs in the consular section, and prevented a qualified EFM from securing long-term employment. Several post officials stated that posts with JO vacancies should automatically be eligible to have PAs fill those positions. Under existing guidelines, posts with vacant JO slots are not automatically assigned PAs, but must wait to be designated PA posts by PER/CDA. Consular officials questioned this lack of program flexibility and suggested that vacancies routinely be made available to PAs instead of selecting specific vacancies for PAs. Accordingly, M/DGP needs to develop a mechanism to fill vacant JO slots outside the JO assignment process.

Recommendation 7: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should create a mechanism whereby professional associates may fill vacated professional associate slots outside of the normal bidding cycle.

M/DGP initially disagreed with Recommendation 7, stating that since the assignments are junior officer jobs designated as PA positions, a PA cannot be assigned independently of the JO assignment process. The option remains for the post to hire a family member in a Consular part-time, intermittent, or temporary (PIT) position on an interim basis until the position can either be filled with a JO or a PA. In a subsequent meeting, we reiterated to M/DGP that we believe it is important from a consistency and workload standpoint to fill the vacant slot as soon as possible with a PA as compared to using some other temporary position and then subsequently replacing that person with a PA or JO. M/DGP officials stated that they would work with the Geographic

bureaus to find an option for filling vacated professional associate positions outside of the JO bidding cycle.

Recommendation 8: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should develop a process for posts to identify vacant JO positions appropriate for professional associates.

M/DGP agreed in principal with the recommendation, stating that with the increased hiring of junior officers they anticipate fewer Consular staffing problems in the future. We agree that increased JO hiring should decrease the number of vacant slots but still believe that M/DGP should develop a process for posts to identify vacant JO positions appropriate for professional associates because there may be changes in the future that affect the Department's ability to hire JOs.

Restrictions on Professional Associate Work

PAs are commissioned as consular assistants instead of consular officers because of legislative restrictions found in 22 CFR, section 40.1 (d), and as a result, there are legal restrictions to their duties. Specifically, PAs currently cannot file first time reports of birth, be the accountable consular officer (reconciling consular fees and visa foils), sign passport applications, and perform notarials that will be used in the U.S. court system. These restrictions have meant that PAs cannot be fully used in consular sections and are sometimes precluded from working on more challenging and interesting consular activities.

Several officers and PAs mentioned to us that PAs are employees of the Department and can be just as accountable as officers for their work. In one case, a PA who had been back-up accountable officer as a consular assistant could not fulfill that duty as a PA. The PA noted:

As a PA, I was sworn in, and have a salary which could be garnished in the event of shortages. I also have a security clearance which allows me complete access to classified information, which is surely more sensitive than the daily cash count. No one likes to be Accountable Officer, but it is not fair to the JOs to exempt an increasingly larger group from having to do it.

The OIG's Office of Inspections issued a report in 1991 on the Bureau of Consular Affairs in which it recommended that CA, working with M/DGP and the Office of the Legal Adviser, take the necessary regulatory action to empower EFMs to authorize visas, sign notarials, and to perform other tasks not requiring the personal attention of career consular officers. In response, the Department has proposed legislation that broadens the definition of "Consular Officer" and removes legislative limitations on what tasks consular PAs can do. The legislation is currently awaiting congressional approval.

Personnel Issues

Lack of Adequate Performance Standards

PAs have many of the same work responsibilities as JOs, but are evaluated on the PIT evaluation form, which is inadequate for PAs. The PIT form is brief and nonspecific, and it does not address the elements for which PAs are responsible or provide adequate space for a narrative describing JO-level work. In addition, PA evaluations do not follow the PA from post to post and are not used to evaluate the PA for future assignments. One PA supervisor noted that the standard PIT form:

[I]s inadequate to properly evaluate the performance of an employee that, regardless of title, does an officer's job. It is a disservice to the PA to try to squeeze their performance into that form and also sends a message that we do not value their service....[I]n order to correctly document a PA's performance in a useful and just manner for all parties concerned, ...the PAs should be evaluated using the EER [Employee Evaluation Report] form used for Foreign Service officers serving in similar positions.

A major flaw with the PA evaluation process is that the Department does not consider the PA's rating as part of any future PA application package. The result is that the Department does not take into account a PA's past performance when considering them for a future post. Several PA supervisors have stated that the lack of a rating history could negatively affect a PA's job performance by removing any incentive to earn a high evaluation and that a more complete evaluation that becomes a permanent part of the PA's file would provide a measure of professional evaluation to the PA's job. PA supervisors agreed that the PIT form is inappropriately brief and lacks space for an in-depth evaluation, but they noted that the JO EER is too detailed for PAs, containing, for example, sections related to promotion and tenure. These sections could be eliminated from the PA form but the sections dealing with work elements could be retained.

Recommendation 9: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should develop and implement a new professional associate employee evaluation report (EER) form that includes appropriate work elements. This form could be similar to the junior officer EER form subject to appropriate modifications.

Recommendation 10: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should include previous professional associate evaluations as part of the application process for professional associate positions.

M/DGP agreed with the recommendations, stating in its response to Recommendation 9 that it is currently standardizing all PIT jobs overseas as part of the new Family Member Appointment (FMA) program. M/DGP believes that an enhanced evaluation form will need to be developed for all family member positions upon implementation of this program.

M/DGP agreed with Recommendation 10, stating that applicants who have previously worked for the U.S. Government should submit their evaluation reports for consideration when they apply for PA positions.

Training Expenses Not Paid

The Department requires PAs in the consular cone to take the same training as JOs. PAs selected for a position at a post receive a salary at the FP-6 grade level (\$29,265 annually) during the training, but are not eligible for per diem or travel funds to Washington, D.C. Travel and per diem expenses associated with the 26-day basic consular training average around \$5,000, significantly more than the PA salary during the training period. Several potential applicants stated that they were dissuaded from applying for a PA position because of the cost of a trip to Washington, DC for training.

Failure to pay for training-related expenses limits the applicant pool to those with the means to return to Washington, DC. By paying training expenses for PAs, or at least the difference between their salaries and the training-related costs, the Department could widen the pool of applicants and, thus, provide greater choice and potentially better qualified candidates for PA positions. PAs, spouses, and officers at several posts stated that they thought the failure by the Department to pay expenses incurred during *required* training for selected PAs was inappropriate. In their view, this reduces program professionalism. In our view, since the Department saves \$105,000 for each PA in a JO position, it is reasonable for the Department to pay for travel to training. Assuming a cost of \$5,000 per PA, per diem and travel expenses for PAs during their training would not significantly diminish the overall cost savings from the program. Similarly to JOs, if the PA does not uphold the first year obligation, s/he should reimburse the Department.

Recommendation 11: The Bureau of Personnel's Office of Career Development and Assignments should arrange for the Department to pay the travel and per diem expenses related to training for selected professional associates. Professional associates who do not fulfill the first year obligation should reimburse their costs to the Department.

M/DGP initially disagreed with the recommendation, stating that when the program was originally established, travel and per diem expenses were not programmed into the budget. M/DGP still considers funding travel and per diem inadvisable because PAs are PIT employees and it would be viewed as unfair to fund only one category of PIT employee while omitting others. M/DGP stated that individual geographic bureaus should have the responsibility of determining whether to fund the training travel and per diem for individual employees in their region, as they do now for PIT employees. In a subsequent meeting with the OIG we explained that the PA position is a "professional" position which should be supported by appropriate training. The OIG's analysis indicated that not funding travel and per diem for PA training was a significant disincentive for potential PA candidates. Therefore, as stated in the recommendation, PER should work with the applicable bureaus to develop a process by which the Department consistently pays the travel and per diem expenses related to training for selected professional

associates. M/DGP officials agreed to coordinate with the applicable bureaus to address this recommendation.

Appendix A - M/DGP's Comments to the Draft Report